"The Desert People" (4) ~~4~~ #28

Box 27 Folder 3

circa 1750-1800

THE DESERT PEOPLE

Before the White Man

It is probable that man has lived in Papaguería ten thousand or more years. The prehistoric period of his life there ended about A.D.1400.[1] Until 1941 we knew very little of the chronology of prehistoric Papaguería. There were many theories, based mainly on findings in surrounding areas correlated with isolated sites on the Reservation, but there was no conclusive evidence. These isolated sites were in the open, and the fragile artifacts which could have served as the basis for the identification had long ago disintegrated.

But in 1941 the opening of Ventana Cave in the northwestern part of the Reservation not only revealed the sequence of cultures in that particular section but proved to be one of the most important archeological discoveries in the whole Southwest. It showed that people lived in Papaguería as long ago as we know that anyone lived on the American continent--more than ten thousand years. Animal remains indicate that these people killed and probably ate animals that are now extinct--the bison, sloth, tapir, and four-horned antelope. Their implements were scrapers, choppers, and points. Some unworked marine shell was found and one mano, which indicates that they ground foodstuffs, probably wild seeds. This culture is a dombination of two others known to archeologists as the San Dieguito I of the lower Colorado River Basin and the Folsom.

After this very early period for which there is cultural evidence the cave was probably uninhabited for a while, as indicated by a disconformity in the deposits and a change in environmental conditions. Then people came again and seem to have

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[1] For information about this period the writer is indebted to Dr. Emil W. Haury, chairman of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Arizona.

lived there more or less continuously almost to the present time, leaving behind them many tools and artifacts. According to archeologists, the next inhabitants after the original people represented an eastward extension of Californian hunters ancestral to the early Pinto-Gypsum (Armagosa I) culture.

Two hunting and gathering cultures associated with modern animals followed. The first of these ended sometime before 1000 B.C.; the second about A.D. I. Both are correlated with phases (Chiricahua and San Pedro) of the Cochise culture of southeastern Arizona and the Pinto-Gypsum stages of the California Desert. They are called "hunting and gathering" cultures because their projectile points, scrapers, planes, and bone awls show that these people must have hunted wild animals and prepared them for food and clothing, and various grinding tools indicate that they gathered wild seeds and roots and ground them for food. However, there is no evidence that any of these peoples either practiced agriculture or made pottery.

In the next stage, beginning about the first century A.D., corn and pottery, which are almost always associated in North America, made their appearance. This indicates the beginning of a more or less sedentary agricultural population. The people who had these arts lived in the cave from the first century until about 1400 and seem to have been a part of the general Hohokan culture[2/] which was spread widely over southern Arizona in this general period. The cave people's culture was, however, a local variation, and Haury has named it "Desert Hohokam" to differentiate it from the "River Hohokam," which is found at the famous site of Snaketown on the Gila River. There are remains of two periods of the Desert Hohokam culture in the cave. Corn and a plain brown pottery were found, characteristic of the earlier period which extended until A.D. 1100. Evidences of the later era (which is the true Desert Hohokam and the period of the greatest population) were also found:

[2/] "Hohokam" if the Piman word for "finished" or "gone." This culture is also called "Red on Buff" from its distinctive pottery. The people of this culture, who were termed by Gladwin "the earliest farmers in Arizona," built canals to water their fields (see W. J. and H. S. Gladwin,"The Eastern Range of the Red on Buff Culture, esp. p. 277).

human mummies, cotton textiles, woven sandals, and baskets, all of which made possible correlation with the River Hohokam culture. Each of these periods is divided into phases, and they are correlated with phases of the River Hohokam.

The irrigation ditch leading from the foothills of the Baboquivari Mountains to fields near Valshni Village (an archeological site in the Sells District) was evidently constructed during the "Sells Phase," about A.D. 1250-1400. This ditch was probably intended to catch and control the flood waters of the mountains and bring them to the cultivated lands. The culture of this phase was rather highly developed and ended, it is estimated, about 1400.

The hiatus between 1400 and 1694, the earliest date in Papago recorded history,[3/] has been called a "dark age," because there is as yet no evidence of a prevailing culture. It is perfectly possible that earlier occupants of the area survived up to the historical period. In Ventana Cave there is no evidence to the contrary. Changes in the culture might have come through the process of normal invention and contact. This belief was reinforced recently by a specialist in the scientific study of corn,[4/] who stated that Papago corn shows botanical characteristics of having been grown in the same environment and by the same people for many centuries. The occupants of Ventana Cave grew the same type of corn a thousand years ago. This suggests a continuity of the Hohokam culture through the Papago, because new immigrants would almost certainly have brought in some new strains of corn.

[3/] Manje, Father Kino's military escort, made a trip through the country in that year.

[4/] Dr. Edgar Anderson, of the Missouri Botanical Gardens, chairman of the Department of Botany, Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.

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